



Morice Region Arability Study Completed

Houston, B.C. – July 9, 2008 Over twenty thousand hectares of undeveloped Crown land in central BC could eventually be available for farmers and ranchers to expand their farming operations. The possibility emerges from the results of a newly-completed study of crown land in the Morice Region, south of Houston, looking at the suitability of the land to grow vegetable, grain and forage crops.

The massive multi-year study, championed by the Pleasant Valley Cattlemen's Association (PVCA), involved site visits, field arability analyses, and mapping. According to PVCA President Shirley Hamblin, it's an extremely timely initiative because of the lack of good land use planning information in the region. "Unlike some resource uses that can be moved across a landscape, arable lands are a finite resource that must be identified and conserved for primarily agricultural use if we are to maintain livestock and crop production opportunities," Hamblin says. "The knowledge gained from this project, we hope, will guide not only future land use planning exercises but also long term Crown land development for agriculture and range use; at least until we learn how to grow good crops on rocks or pavement!"

The lands identified in the study include areas most likely to be arable and least likely to result in resource conflicts with other users. Targeted areas will be further delineated to minimize inclusion of land of high value for other purposes, such as First Nations cultural resources and fish and wildlife habitat. With the completion of this additional work, farmers and ranchers will be able to apply for access to expand their operations. As with all Crown land applications, eligibility criteria will apply.

Partners in the project include Agriculture and Agri-food Canada's Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-foods Program (ACAAF), the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, the B.C. Ministry of Forests, and the Beef Cattle Industry Development Fund. The Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C. delivers the ACAAF program on behalf of the federal government. According to IAF Chair Stuart Wilson, the arability maps resulting from the study are excellent tools for farmers seeking to expand their operations. "The maps show them where the good land is," said Wilson. "The field data will even tell them what kind of soil there is in a particular area and what crops would be best adapted."

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